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CHRONICLE

Greece's disinformation daily?

While readers in other Western countries were learning about the slaughter of 269 persons aboard a civilian jetliner over the Soviet Union last September, many Greeks were getting a slightly different version.

THE JUMBO IN THE COURSE OF THE U-2, proclaimed a September 4 headline in the most widely read daily newspaper in this strategically vital NATO nation of 10 million. The following day, a subhead in the same paper described the Korean 747 as a PREPARED PROVOCATION BY THE CIA AND DEFINITE ESPIONAGE. With few exceptions, such as a UPI report comparing the jetliner's route with that of the U.S. RC-135 spy plane, the paper used Tass and Pravda to cover the story.

Such coverage comes as no surprise to the 200,000 readers of *Ethnos*, which has published upbeat articles about Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the Jaruzelski regime in Poland, Syrian tactics in Lebanon, and Libyan involvement in Chad. (Concomitantly, *Ethnos* — in English, *The Nation* — provided little coverage of the pope's visit to Poland, or of various disarmament proposals periodically floated by Western leaders.) The paper's editorial line is similarly and unequivocally pro-Soviet. "Nineteen Eighty Two was the sixtieth anniversary of the first peace bloc in history: the Soviet Union," *Ethnos* declared in a Christmas commentary last year. "The Christian version and the socialist necessity of peace will triumph and will be established on earth whether the Antichrists and the anti-socialists like it or not."

Owned and operated by an avowedly apolitical Greek businessman, *Ethnos* is a tabloid that uses color photography, slick graphics, and excellent local reporting to snare a readership that is not limited by political boundaries. "*Ethnos*," says a Western diplomat, "is a modern newspaper using modern marketing techniques, unlike other Greek newspapers, which in some cases are just crowded masses of black ink."

Although *Ethnos*'s editor, Alexander Filippopoulos, says that his paper "is really independent, even though that fact displeases many," that claim was strongly challenged early last summer by Athens journalist Paul

Anastasi, a thirty-three-year-old, Cypriot-born free-lancer who corresponds for *The New York Times* and *The London Daily Telegraph*. In a 317-page book, Anastasi spelled out evidence which he says shows that *Ethnos* "is a classic, fascinating example of disinformation in practice." Titled *Take The Nation In Your Hands*, the book (which has not been translated into English) contends, according to a press release issued by its publisher, that *Ethnos* "continues to operate in cooperation with the disinformation department of the first chief directorate of the KGB," the Soviet intelligence service.

Following the book's publication, *Ethnos*'s publisher, George Bobolas, sued Anastasi for libel, calling the author a "CIA agent" and "a remnant of society." Anastasi in turn countersued *Ethnos* for character defamation.

The libel trial, which opened in Athens on September 13, was marked by repeated shouting matches between the opposing attorneys and between Bobolas and Anastasi themselves. At one point — before a crowd of one hundred spectators — *Ethnos*'s Bobolas threatened to make public the contents of Anastasi's private telephone conversations. Responding that he had nothing to hide, Anastasi told Bobolas to go ahead. After five hours, the trial was adjourned for several weeks to allow both sides more time to gather witnesses.

In the book to which Bobolas has taken such violent exception, Anastasi describes in detail what he claims was a five-year relationship between the publisher and Soviet officials:

□ In 1977, partly through the encouragement of the pro-Soviet Greek communist party, veteran communist publisher Yannis Yannikios entered into a partnership with Bobolas, a successful businessman free of any significant past leftist associations.

□ In June 1978, the two men went to Moscow where contracts were signed with

VAAP, the official Soviet copyright agency, for the publication of a Greek-language edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.

□ Among the Soviet officials who met privately with Bobolas in Moscow were Politburo member Constantin Chernenko, the then heir apparent to Leonid Brezhnev, and Boris Pankin, then (according to Anastasi) department director of KGB disinformation, who is currently the Soviet ambassador to Sweden. Anastasi contends that the Soviets displayed particular interest in a feasibility study for a daily newspaper that one of the partners was working on. That paper, he says, was to become *Ethnos*.

□ Just before the launching of *Ethnos* in the autumn of 1981, Yannikios — the veteran communist — was forced out of the partnership, Anastasi claims, by a variety of pressure tactics applied by Bobolas. In May 1982, according to Anastasi, Colonel Vassili Romanovich Sitnikov, head of the KGB's Department for NATO Deception Operations, visited Athens in an attempt to persuade Yannikios to drop a lawsuit against Bobolas and to accept the publisher's offer of compensation.

Thus Anastasi provides readers with an abundance of circumstantial evidence, obtained, it is generally assumed, through the offices of Yannikios, who had every motivation to squeal. Concerning the principal allegation that Bobolas is an agent of foreign disinformation, however, Anastasi gives no direct proof.

Watching Bobolas's lawsuit from the sidelines with obvious interest is the socialist government of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, whose neutralist foreign policy has been supported by *Ethnos* (Greece was the only member of the Western alliance that refused to blame the Soviet Union for the downing of the Korean airliner). A former minister in Papandreou's cabinet is serving as one of *Ethnos*'s trial lawyers. And government spokesman Dimitris Maroudas, while admitting to reporters that he hadn't read Anastasi's book, belittled it last summer as a "thriller appropriate for holiday reading."

Regardless of what the Greek government, the Athens court, or any other body thinks of Anastasi's book, the success of *Ethnos* itself is disturbing to pro-Westerners. For, whatever its true origins, the fact remains that it has managed to find a large, broadly based readership in a country that hosts vital American military bases.

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